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**Resources and Development Committee recommends
approval of Navajo Nation General Leasing Regulations of 2013**
Naabik'íyátí Committee approves legislation which now moves on to Council

WINDOW ROCK – The Resources and Development Committee on Tuesday, considered Legislation No. 0189-13, which seeks to approve the 2013 Navajo Nation General Leasing Regulations and enacting the same in Title 16 §2301 *ET SEQ.* of the Navajo Nation Code.

The purpose of Legislation No. 0189-13 is to streamline agricultural, religious, educational, recreational, and residential leasing processes by authorizing the Navajo Nation to issue such leases without having to seek the approval of the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, excluding mineral and right-of-way leases.

Legislation co-sponsor Council Delegate David Tom (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi'í'áhi/To'Koi, Red Valley, Sheepsprings, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé alnáoz't'í'í) stressed the importance of approving the bill, as it would improve the efficiency of the land leasing process by eliminating the role of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Mike Halona, Department Manager of the Navajo Land Department, added that the legislation serves as an enabling legislation for the Federal 'Helping Expedite and Advance Responsible Tribal Homeownership' Act.

The HEARTH Act was signed by President Obama in July 2012, and gives tribes the authority to process land leases without BIA approval.

The intent of the HEARTH Act is to promote investments in tribal communities and facilitate economic development by reducing the time it takes to approve leases for home and small businesses in Indian Country.

RDC member Council Delegate Leonard H. Pete (Chinle) said the approval of the proposed leasing regulations would improve the overall planning processes for future developments by laying the foundation to better understand the geography of Navajo land.

"I do support this initiative and the effort that the Navajo Land Department has made. It would be a great advancement to see leases and maps digitized," said Delegate Pete.

RDC chair Council Delegate Katherine Benally (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) added that the proposed bill would assist all Navajo People, by giving the Nation control over surface land leasing and permits.

“Right now the [land] leasing process is very incompatible with the needs of our chapters, we have the opportunity to make it more compatible with the needs of the people we represent,” added Delegate Benally.

Before the final vote, Halona also explained that with the passage of the legislation, the Navajo Land Department would establish it’s own land leasing records system and continue to send copies of land transactions to the BIA for their own records.

The RDC approved Legislation No. 0189-13 with a vote of 3-0.

When the legislation was brought before the Naabik’íyátí Committee for consideration on Thursday, primary sponsor Council Delegate Russell Begaye (Shiprock) asked for his colleagues’ support, calling the bill “a historic and land mark legislation.”

“We are taking what has been the responsibility of the BIA for years, and giving it to the Navajo Nation,” Delegate Begaye stated.

The initiative was met with skepticism from Council Delegate Lorenzo Curley (Houck, Klagnetoh, Nahata Dziil, Tsé Si áni, Wide Ruins), who cautioned that assuming the responsibility of land leasing would create more “red tape” within the Nation’s government and questioned if the Nation has funds to assume the responsibility.

“Is this something that will come out of the Nation’s General Funds or are there federal dollars for it?” Delegate Curley asked.

Delegate Pete expressed optimism over the legislation and said that he hopes it will lead to land reform across the Navajo Nation.

“I hope with this legislation, we can set up a mechanism to use our land effectively,” Delegate Pete said.

After an hour of discussion, Naabik’íyátí Committee members unanimously approved Legislation No. 0189-13, with a 10-0 vote.

The legislation now moves on to the Navajo Nation Council for final consideration.

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